

# Native American Cancer Research Corporation

## Breast Health Fact Sheet



- Are your breasts healthy?
- Breast cancer is more common among Alaska Natives, Northern & Southern Plains Indian women than among Natives from other regions in the US. Identifying & treating breast problems early helps increase survival.
- You can talk with your provider about your breast health risks
- Now you know. Now you can.

### Natives & Breast Cancer Facts

- Breast cancer is increasing every year among Native women
- Breast cancer is more common among Natives living in Alaska, the Northern Plains and Southern Plains than in other parts of the country.
- Breast cancer is less common among southwestern Tribal Nations.
  - But even in the southwest, breast cancer is the 2nd leading type of cancer among Native women.
- Providers can get clear mammogram pictures of Native women's breasts who are in their 40s (white women usually need to be in their 50s for a clear picture) [Roubidoux & Kaur]
- About half of Native women are younger than 50 when they are diagnosed with breast cancer (Only ¼ of white women are diagnosed younger than 50)

### Healthy Behaviors

- Today, cancer is the 2nd leading cause of death among American Indians 45 years and older
  - But it was uncommon among our ancestors
- We need to:
  - Practice healthy habits like having daily physical activity
  - Eat more home-cooked and traditional foods, rather than "fast foods" restaurants.
  - Have regular health checkups
  - Have regular screenings that look for cancer

### Arlene Wahwasuck

Prairie Band Potawatomie  
Dx breast cancer 2002

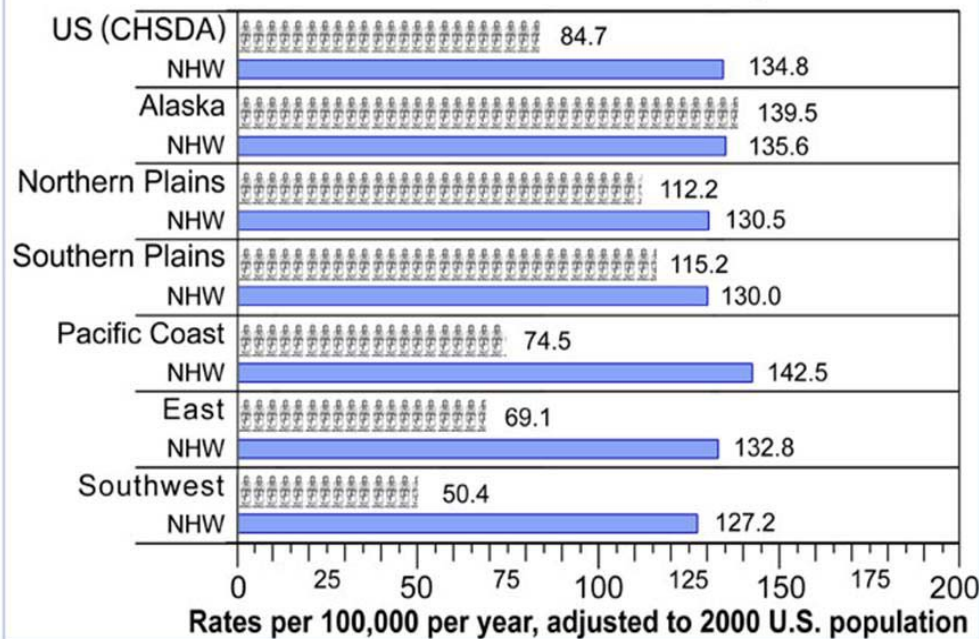
*"I asked my doctor for the mammogram"*



### Breast Cancer Facts

- We do not know how to "prevent" breast cancer
- We do know how to find it early when it is just beginning to grow and when it is easier to beat.
- There are different types of breast cancer
- They spread and act differently in the body
  - Some types of breast cancer begin to spread as the initial tumor is developing
  - Others grow for about 7 years before it can be felt.
- Breast cancer usually occurs in women older than 40
- The younger the woman is at the time of diagnosis, the more likely the cancer is to spread
- Because men also have breast tissue, they too can get breast cancer (but 100 times more common in women than men).
- Lesbians are also at risk for breast cancer.
- Young women (20's and 30's) also develop breast cancer.
- The size of a woman's breast does not matter – small breasted women also get breast cancer.
- If "breast" cancer spreads to the bone or brain, it is still "breast cancer" [such as, "breast cancer of the brain"]

## Breast Cancer Incidence Rates - Females, 1999-2004



## Graph Legend

- CHSDA: IHS Contract Health Service Delivery Area
- NHW: Non-Hispanic White
- Alaska: includes *all* of Alaska
- Northern Plains: 11 states: IA, IL, IN, MI, MN, MT, NE, ND, SD, WI, WY
- Southern Plains: 3 states: KS, OK, TX
- Pacific Coast: 4 states: CA, ID, OR, WA
- East: 25 states, such as FL, GA, MO, MS, NC, NY, PA, TN
- Southwest: AZ, CO, NM, NV, UT

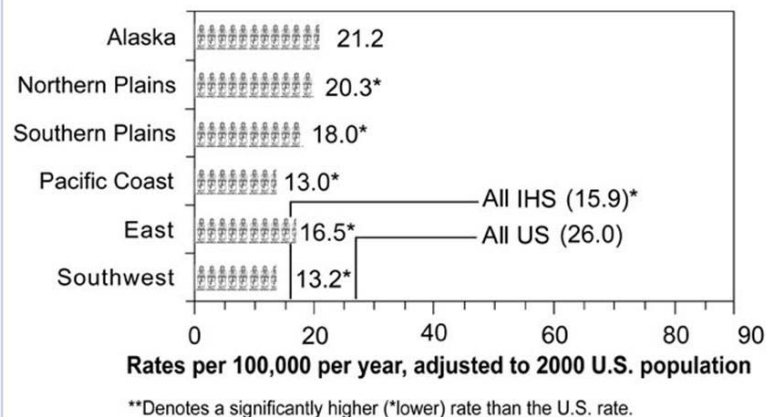
Espey, David K; Wo, Xiao-Chen; Swan Judith; Wiggins, Charles; Jim, Melissa A.; Ward, Elizabeth; Howe, Holly L.; Ries, Lynn A.G.; Miller, Barry A.; Jemal, Ahmedin; Ahmed, Faruque; Cobb, Nathaniel; Kaur, Judith S.; and Edwards, Brenda K. Annual Report to the Nation on the Status of Cancer, 1975-2004, Featuring Cancer in American Indians and Alaska Natives. Cancer [American Cancer Society]: 2007 [11-15-07]; Volume 110: No. 10. **GRAPH MODIFIED BY Rick Clark, Native American Cancer Research**

## Symptoms of Breast Problems

- A change in the size or shape of your breast
- A lump or thickening of your breast or in your armpit
- Nipple discharge when you are not pregnant or breast feeding
- Inverted nipples or nipples that point in a different direction than before
- The skin appears rough or orange-tinted (similar to the texture of an orange peel) redness or scaling of nipples or breast
- Dimples on the breast or chest / armpit area (they look like the dimples that some people have on their faces when they smile).
- Nipple pain

**If you have ANY of symptoms, you need to have your healthcare provider check things out**

## Breast Cancer Death Rates Females, 1999-2003



Haverkamp D, Espey D, Paisano R, Cobb N. *Cancer Mortality Among American Indians and Alaska Natives: Regional Differences, 1999-2003*. Indian Health Service, Rockville, MD, February 2008.

**GRAPHS MODIFIED BY: Rick Clark, Native American Cancer Research (note horizontal grid)**

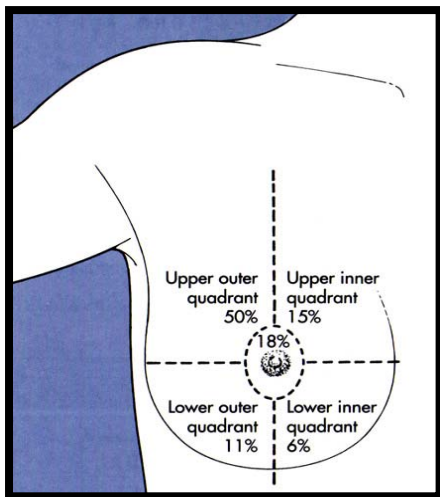


Jennie Joe, RN, PhD  
Navajo  
Dx. Breast 1989

*It was overwhelming... I kept saying to myself, I just am not the high risk type... [breast cancer] has never been in my family before... ...I think that most women have to remember that they more than anybody else about their body.*

## Breast Health Screening

- By age 18, do monthly Breast Self-Exams (BSE)
  - Some organizations do not recommend BSE, but many Native women find lumps in their breasts through BSE
  - You should know what your breasts feel like
  - American Cancer Society provides instructions for BSE
- Have your health provider perform a Clinical Breast Exam during your annual checkup.
- Have your annual mammogram if you have symptoms or are high risk, or at least when you are 40 years old
  - Younger women need a different type of screening because their breast tissue is dense and it is harder to “see” abnormalities.



**Most breast problems are NOT cancer. Please talk with your healthcare provider.**



## Clinical Breast Exam (CBE) Once a Year

- Having your provider check your breasts for lumps as part of your yearly check-up

## What are Screening Mammograms? [a “diagnostic” mammogram is done any time there is a question or concern]

- A mammogram squeezes the breast between 2 clear “plates” and is uncomfortable.
- It is best to have it about 10 days after your moon when your breasts are not too tender
- Screening mammograms are every 1-2 years, once you are 40 or sooner if you have symptoms or your provider recommends one earlier
  - Some women have their exams about the same time as their birthdays
- A mammogram takes about 15 minutes (times vary)
- For the exam, you will need to take off your shirt/blouse and bra
- You will be given a nightgown top to wear into the mammography room

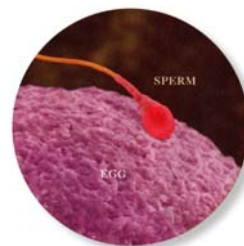


## What is Breast Tissue?

- Breast tissue (cells) are in the chest area, not just in the mass supported by our bras
- This tissue is in your chest wall up to your collar bone
- It extends to under our arms
- It is under our breast to our ribs
- It is wide to our breast bone
- Although breast tissue is all over our chest wall, the locations of most cancers is in the upper outer quadrant of the breast

## Some Questions about “Hereditary Breast Cancers”

- “Heredity” means that the characteristic came from the sperm and egg (from your dad and mom) when you were conceived in the womb
- Hereditary cancers account for only 5-10% of all breast cancers in non-Natives
- Natives have very low risks for hereditary types of breast cancer
  - BRCA1 & BRCA2 are 2 types of hereditary breast cancer.
  - People with BRCA1 or BRCA2 have cancers of the breast, ovary, colon/rectal, prostate and/or pancreas
- There are also cancers that are common in families, but are NOT “hereditary”



## Where can You Get Breast Health Screening?

- 📦 Tribal, urban Indian and state programs provide free annual breast screening for Native women who
  - 🕒 Do not have private health insurance (and IHS is NOT “insurance”)
  - 🕒 Are 50 years old or are high risk or have symptoms
  - 🕒 Live in poverty

**The “shield” of health** protecting against breast cancer may include daily physical activity, healthy low fat diet, & limited or no alcohol,

**Risks that “damage” the shield of health include:**

1. Being a woman (the greatest risk)
2. Growing older
3. Personal history of breast cancer
4. Personal history of another type of cancer
5. Early moon / onset of period (under 12) or late menopause (over 55)
6. Hereditary risk (e.g., BRCA1, BRCA2) *only cause 5-10% of all breast cancer – extremely rare in Native Americans*
7. Family history (risk is greater if “1<sup>st</sup> degree family member had breast cancer”
  - a. 1<sup>st</sup> degree means your parents, siblings or children
8. Sedentary life style
9. Over recommended body weight by 15-20 pounds (high fat / calorie diet)
10. Drinking equivalent to more than 7 alcoholic drinks in a week
11. No birth children or 1<sup>st</sup> child after the age of 30.
12. Breast feeding less than 1½ years

Partially supported by “Native Navigators and the Cancer Continuum (NNACC) [PI: Burhansstipanov, R24MD002811]

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**Native American Cancer Survivors’ Network**  
**1-800-537-8295**

<http://www.NatAmCancer.org>



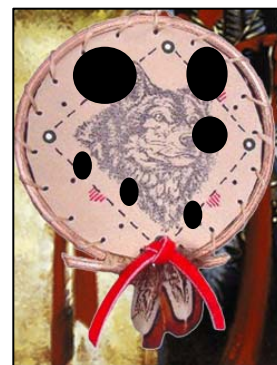
## What “Causes” Breast Cancer?

- 📦 “Cause” means there is a direct link between the behavior or “factor” that may result in cancer (like habitual use of manufactured tobacco causing lung problems)
  - 🕒 The “cause” may be hereditary, but these types of breast cancer are very rare among Native women (<1%)
- 📦 A “Risk Factor” usually is a behavior or exposure to something that increases your chances of getting cancer (see the shield of health / risks)



**The shield of health / risks**

**What does the shield below tell you about this woman's cancer risks?**



The holes mean the woman has risks for breast cancer



Partially supported by Mayo  
Clinic's Spirit of Eagles  
Community Network  
Programs [PI: Kaur: NCI  
U01 CA 114609]